

Reports of this office tool's death have been greatly exaggerated.

# Fax Lives!

By Steve Adams

## SAMPLE

**IT SEEMS LIKE THE PUNDITS ARE ALWAYS** predicting the end of this or that. Remember when e-commerce first became popular, and they said there would be no more brick-and-mortar stores? Last time I looked, the retail malls near me were busier than ever. Or how home theater systems and video on demand would put the local multiplex out of business? Nice job on that prediction, too.

Then there was the demise of the fax. The “wise ones” said that with email on every computer, faxing as a means of communication would become nothing but a distant memory. They really missed the boat on that one, since according to analyst organization IDC, the market for faxes is \$80 billion and growing—as is the number of pages transmitted each year. Both are far higher than they were in faxing’s supposed heyday in the mid-1980s.

Of course, some things should go away as progress delivers better ways of doing them: Internet fax services have made sending and receiving faxes much more efficient.

If you haven’t made the move yet, following are seven signs indicating you might want to retire that old fax machine or fax server and replace it with an Internet fax service.

- There are so many faxed pages on your floor that the U.S. Olympic Committee has asked if they can use your office to train the Alpine ski team. Internet fax services allow all faxes to be delivered directly to your PC, laptop, PDA or other device, eliminating the need to sort faxes after delivery.

- You hear the fax machine ringing constantly—even when you’re not at the of-

ice. While it’s not quite as bad as hearing voices in your head, phantom ringing can still be annoying. Internet fax services use the Internet instead of phone lines to connect you with the outside world, putting an end to the endless ringing.

- Everyone in the office seems to know the most intimate details about your latest business proposal, medical condition, divorce and traffic accident. Remember: Madge the office gossip is also Madge the person in charge of delivering faxes when they come in. She can’t help reading them before dropping them off, which gives her an extra special glimpse into everyone’s business and personal lives. Internet fax services offer far greater privacy by going directly into your email account or remaining on a secure server.

- That important fax you were waiting for comes in looking like some psychologist’s ink blot test. Unless you were actually waiting for an ink blot test to arrive, getting a fax that’s dark and filled with splotches where words and pictures are supposed to be can cause you to lose hours or even days on a job. Internet fax services not only deliver cleaner faxes (by not losing a generation in transmission); as electronic documents they often can be lightened or otherwise adjusted to make them more readable.

- You find yourself playing “name that tune” with the phone tones while sending the same fax to multiple recipients. Sending faxes one at a time to multiple recipients can be boring and time consuming. Internet fax services allow you to fax an unlimited number of recipients at once—the same way you would send multiple

emails. It may not be as much fun as playing “name that tune,” but it’s a lot more efficient.

- You can recite the 12-step instructions on how to scan a page into the document management system by heart, despite the fact that you can’t remember what you had for lunch. Electronic document management (EDM) is mandatory at many companies thanks to Sarbanes-Oxley, HIPAA, or even internal corporate governance initiatives. In these firms, paper faxes have to be entered into the system somehow—usually by being scanned and converted to electronic form by someone who has more important things to do. Faxes sent through Internet fax services are already in electronic form, so they can generally be uploaded as is. The better services offer conversion to a choice of formats compatible with your EDM system.

- You find out your local phone company has named you “customer of the year.” That can only mean one thing: You’re spending way too much on telecom costs. Internet fax services use the Internet connection you already have instead of special phone lines, allowing you to realize significant savings on monthly service charges and maintenance. That also means mobile workers can log in to send and receive faxes anywhere they can find an Internet connection—not just at the office—saving both time and money.

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